

AGAMA AMBON TRANSFORMED: RELIGION IN EXILE

ANTJE VAN DER HOEK
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

Introduction¹

Gregory Bateson (1972: 68) introduced the term “schismogenesis” to describe a possible development in cultural contacts. As Bartels (1989) has shown, this idea of cultural schismogenesis can also be applied to the reaction of the Malukans to their sudden migration from the military camps (*tangsi*) in several areas of the former colony to the camps in the Netherlands. All at once their status as “black Dutchmen” (*belanda hitam*), born in the “Twelfth Province of Holland”—as Maluku was considered in colonial times—had disappeared. Schismogenetic developments that disrupted the symbiotic Malukan–Dutch relationship that existed in colonial times can be seen in various fields: in adat, which underwent revitalization and reinterpretation; in language, where the use of Malay became a symbol of group solidarity and cohesion; and also in the emphasis put on Malukan collectivism. The RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan) ideal, Bartels observed, formed the “nucleus of schismogenesis” and, in the period preceding the hijackings, was the “ultimate identity marker” with respect to Dutch society (Bartels 1989: 270). The transformation of the former Malukan symbiosis with the Dutch into a new negative perception of the Dutch completed the process of schismogenesis. The stressing of cultural differences, rather than similarities, that distinguished the culture of Malukan exiles from that of their former colonial masters, as Bartels has observed, had its counterpart in the religious field. Attending the services of their own Malukan churches enabled the Malukans to display their exclusive ethnoreligious identity.

¹This article should be interpreted as a preliminary research report. An extensive exploration of this issue will be published in my dissertation.

The churches in exile transformed the Agama Ambon (Central Maluku Protestantism as it developed during colonial times) by preserving certain colonial church traditions and ecclesiastical structures as well as by introducing new distinctive features. Because of the “special bond,” the debt of honor that the Dutch felt they owed the Malukans, Malukan religious life was heavily subsidized. Not until the beginning of the 1990s did all the Malukan religious organizations become financially independent. The umbilical tie to the Dutch State was finally broken.

It may be argued that the transformation of the Agama Ambon took place within the scope of a three-cornered constellation consisting of the Republik Indonesia, the Republik Maluku Selatan, and Holland. Being neither Dutch nor Indonesian, nor wanting to be, the Agama Ambon had to avoid either extreme. In addition, however, an overt commitment to the Republik Maluku Selatan had also to be avoided, since this would too closely identify religion with nationalistic aims. Within this triangular framework a whole spectrum of Malukan churches came into existence. In explaining this phenomenon, I will make use of a typology of churches, reflecting different degrees of schismogenesis with respect to the Indonesian churches (more specifically, the Geredja Protestan Maluku in Ambon), on the one hand, and the Dutch churches on the other. I hope to make clear how internal markers of ethnoreligious identity are being used in order to distinguish one church from the other, and in what way an external marker of ethnoreligious identity plays a defining role with regard to the Dutch churches.

A typology of churches

In the continuum of Malukan churches in the Netherlands, three types can be distinguished:

1. *Indonesia-oriented churches*, which orient themselves, both liturgically and in a broader theological sense, on the Indonesian churches. Examples of this type include the small Geredja Protestan Indonesia (GPI), the Koordinasi Jemaat Protestan Indonesia di Nederland (KJPIN), the Geredja Protestant Maluku Tenggara and the Geredja Protestant Maluku Tenggara Umum (GPMTU). Quantitatively, these churches are a rather peripheral phenomenon, comprising on average about 200 people each. Significantly, most of these churches consist almost entirely of people with a Keiese background. In the KJPIN, key positions are filled by Southeast Malukans, more precisely by

Tanimbarese or Babarese. However, people with a Central Malukan heritage may also be discerned in this church.

2. *Ambon-oriented churches* emphasize the interim character of the local church organization and stress their bonds with the mother church, the Geredja Protestan Maluku in Ambon. This idea of the church as a provisional solution was especially obvious within the Geredja Protestan Maluku Djemaat Darurat (GPMDD), in which a group of people opting for repatriation were united. Among the churches in this category are those tracing their genesis back to the church initially established by the army minister, *pendeta* J. B. Keiluhu, in March 1953, such as the Noodgemeente Geredja Protestan Maluku di Belanda (NGPMB), and some churches of a very modest size such as the Noodgemeente Geredja Protestan Maluku di Belanda Vught (NGPMB Vught) and the Geredja Protestan Maluku Culemborg (GPM Culemborg).
3. *RMS-oriented churches* express their implicit or explicit solidarity with the Malukan people and their struggle for the realization of an independent South Malukan Republic. A rather implicit solidarity with the RMS was declared by the Geredja Indjili Maluku (GIM), to which the mainstream of Malukan Protestantism in the Netherlands belongs. This church professed its loyalty to the Malukan people (*bangsa*) and, implicitly, to the ideal of a separate state. In this way it tried to avoid a complete identification of ecclesiastical and nationalistic aspirations. The synod board of the GIM therefore usually responded with severe criticism to any overt identification of the church with the RMS ideal or with (imagined) political sympathies towards the Republic Indonesia. This sometimes even resulted in the dismissal of a minister.

An official and explicit identification of ecclesiastical and political aims is characteristic of the Geredja Nasional Protestan Republik Maluku Selatan (GNPRMS). In compliance with the political views of General Isaac Tamaela, this church was “proclaimed” and wholly subservient to the struggle (*perjuangan*) fought “before the international world” at the United Nations in New York, in the small West African state of Benin and, it was argued, in Central Maluku itself. The chairman of the church administration combined his function as a minister of the church with the political function of adviser in the provisional government (Pemerintah Darurat) of Tamaela.

The Geredja Kristen Maluku Selatan (GKMS) and the Geredja Kristen Maluku Selatan Oktober 1969 (GKMS oktober 1969) also belong to this type since they relate the identity of their church to the RMS proclamation and the historical events occurring thereafter to the Malukan ex-KNIL soldiers.

The common evangelical basis shared by most of the Malukan churches in the Netherlands is expressed by the usage of a common seal, imprinted with 1 Corinthians 3:6. This seal, which was taken over from the Geredja Protestan Maluku in Ambon, symbolizes their common credo as well as their common heritage. In contrast to church schisms that result mainly from differences of opinion with regard to doctrine, the schismatic processes taking place within the Malukan churches were caused by the specific politico-historical context of the Malukan ex-KNIL soldiers. As Bartels has argued, these schisms can be traced back to the political discord, ethnic divisiveness, and age-old animosities along island, village, and family lines (Bartels 1989: 193). However, an important source of conflict should be added to this list: the failure to transplant certain structures or habits derived from the KNIL or the colonial church administration into the postcolonial Dutch setting. Authoritarian patterns of behavior, for example, previously applied when dealing with church issues, no longer worked the way they did in the past. Without causing any essential differences in matters of faith, these factors left the Protestant Malukan exile community profoundly divided.

Internal markers of ethnoreligious identity

I will now turn to the so-called “internal markers of ethnoreligious identity,” which characterize the three distinct types of churches mentioned above. The following criteria, functioning as internal boundaries, may be distinguished: (a) the name of the church, (b) the language used during the services, and (c) the “ritual profile.”

Church names

A perusal of the names of Malukan exile churches reveals their identification with specific regions or countries of origin. They frequently contain the words “Indonesia,” “Maluku” or “Maluku Selatan,” “Maluku Tenggara,” or “Republik Maluku Selatan.” Frequent lawsuits by one faction or another over the exclusive right to include a particular term in the church name reveal that these naming practices are not arbitrary. The

use of the same name by two antagonistic groups after they separate is considered both illegitimate and confusing. Although the Dutch separation of church and state prevents the courts of justice from interfering in theological issues, legal verdicts are often used by Malukan church leaders in order to prove the theological authenticity of their group and to demonstrate the falsity of their opponents' views. For instance, the Geredja Kristen Maluku Selatan oktober 1969, which separated from the Geredja Kristen Maluku Selatan over a dispute about a minister, took the verdict of the court as a legitimization of its being "the only true church," dating from the time the "original" church was established.

Language use

During the services of the churches in exile, several languages are spoken: Classical Malay (Melayu Tinggi), Bahasa Indonesia, or Church Malay, which might include Bahasa Indonesia alternating with Dutch. As the usage of one of these languages is intimately connected with the identity of the church, it should not be surprising that Bahasa Indonesia is common in the Indonesia-oriented Malukan churches such as the Geredja Protestan Indonesia (GPI) and the Koördinasi Djemaat Protestan Indonesia di Nederland (KDPIN). Church Malay is the ceremonial language of the majority of the Malukan churches; local varieties are to be registered with respect to the usage of Dutch, along with Malay, during the services. Initially the usage of the Dutch language was born from necessity, in order to communicate with the younger generations. In the Geredja Indjili Maluku, both monolingual and bilingual services can be found. The choice of monolingual or bilingual services very much depends on the *pendeta*'s generation and background. In the early 1960s, the "language issue" was especially pressing for the synod board of the Geredja Indjili Maluku, since they saw themselves confronted with members of the younger generation, who no longer wanted to attend the services because they were not able to understand the preaching. Some even considered splitting up into a Dutch-speaking and a Malay-speaking community, as in colonial times (*Komunikasi: Nieuwsbrief voor onderwijsgeevenden aan Molukse kinderen* 1985, 11: 41). This idea was not accepted, since it would only widen the generation gap. However, it is significant that this frame of reference was used by the church leaders in order to seek a possible solution. Choice of language is thus a generational as well as a political issue. With respect to orthography: the

Indonesian-oriented churches use the new orthography of standard Bahasa Indonesia, while the other religious communities write according to the linguistic rules of so-called Exile Malay (*ballingschaps Maleis*).

Ritual profile

These three types of churches are also distinguished by differences of ritual. During the 1980s new liturgical ideas in the Geredja Indjili Maluku did not lead to changes in liturgical practice. The Mazmur dan Tahlil, a hymnbook dating from colonial times, is still generally used during the services. A new liturgical impulse within the Noodgemeente Geredja Protestan Maluku di Belanda was evidenced when the church leadership decided to introduce the Mazmur dan Njanjian Rohani (composed by the Dutch missionary, I. S. Kijne), current at the time in Indonesia. However, this attempt encountered much resistance from members of the church council (*madjelis geredja*) as well as from members of the community. As time went by, however, the new hymns became part of the church tradition. Kidung Jemaat, a hymnbook now commonly used within the entire Indonesian Archipelago, has found its way to the small Keiese community in Zevenaar, united in the Geredja Protestan Indonesia (GPI) and the Koördinasi Jemaat Protestan Indonesia in Arnhem. One liturgical practice that intertwines religion and politics dates back to the beginning of the period in exile. The sociologist Wittermans, who studied early camp life in Schattenberg (Westerbork) in 1952–1953, mentions the weekly liturgical gathering in commemoration of the RMS proclamation, the so-called *sembahjang negara* (Wittermans 1991: 57) or *kebaktian tanah air*. After the move to the wards, this weekly practice was continued by the army chaplain, *pendeta* S. Metiary. Nowadays, two models of liturgy exist, used every Friday or on the 24th of each month. This monthly service is celebrated in other Geredja Indjili Maluku communities as well, sometimes in cooperation with the Noodgemeente Geredja Protestan Maluku di Belanda (NGPMB) or with other Malukan churches. Ritual symbolism of an explicit RMS nature was found within the Geredja Nasional Protestan Republik Maluku Selatan (GNPRMS).

In contrast to such developments among the Protestants, the mixture of religious and political aims has always been absent within the small Muslim community (2.5% of the total population). Although the RMS ideal was supported by some of the Muslims, it never pervaded Islamic

rituals as it did within the Protestant churches. This was already so in 1952–1953, as Wittermans (1991: 121) observed, and has not changed since. For the Muslim minority, the choice between Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, or Dutch was not a matter related to their search for identity within the new Dutch context, since their religion itself offered them a separate religious language: Arabic. During prayer services in the mosques Arabic and Dutch or Indonesian are used.

Cohabitation or *hidup bersama*

As an example of what I would like to call an external marker of ethno-religious identity, we will now turn to the subject of cohabitation (*hidup bersama*, *saamenwonen*). Over the past 15 years, the phenomenon of cohabitation has gradually become accepted within the mainstream of Dutch society. Initial criticism of these new developments by some of the Dutch churches has more or less diminished over time. In the more open setting outside of the camps, the new pattern of living together without being married infiltrated the Malukan wards and gained some popularity among young adults. Sometimes cohabitation was simply preferred over marriage, but sometimes it was also necessary to avoid conflicts between families or *adat* taboos (such as the *pela*-exogamy rule). In answer to these social changes the synod board of the Geredja Indjili Maluku decided in September 1982 to exclude couples living together without marriage from taking part in the Lord's Supper or Geredja Besar, and from becoming godfathers or godmothers (*Bapa* or *Mama Serani*) at baptisms. Thus, rules previously unwritten were made explicit. But this decision lacked a sound theological basis in scripture, dogma, or ethics. A committee was set up to reflect on these questions. The synod's decision placed people living together without being married "under discipline" (*dibawah siasat*)—just like thieves, drunks, gamblers, and adulterers who, because of their conduct, were prohibited from partaking in church ceremonies so central to Malukan Christianity. Even though the decision was made by the assembly of the synod board, it was not supported unanimously by the *pendetas*, especially not the younger ones. This created problems both for persons under pastoral care and for the pastors themselves.

Some argued that the prohibition on participation should not be used as a penalty, although they did not necessarily imply that the practice of *hidup bersama* should be viewed positively. The Malukan periodical

Tjengkeh (1983, 6/7: 12) explicitly reproached “traditionalism” or “isolationism.” Despite such divergences of opinion, the GIM officially clung to its decision that marriage should be considered the only legitimate form of cohabitation, based on the Bible as well as on Malukan adat. In June 1992, this decision of ten years earlier was confirmed (*Surat keputusan* no. 10, 16–18 June 1992).

The smaller churches did not take an official stand on this issue, but differences of opinion in the church councils and communities become apparent whenever some case occurs.

The issue of *hidup bersama* has thus become a rallying point in the struggle for an ethnoreligious identity separate from the Dutch churches, where “norms tend to loosen.” Since the family (*rumah tangga*) forms the social basis of church life, threats to it—as in cases of cohabiting “sons-in-law” or “daughters-in-law” who do not officially belong to the family—cannot be tolerated. Based on strong collectivist principles, church cohesion would be seriously endangered by tendencies toward increasing individualization, of which *hidup bersama* is just one symptom. (In this respect, it is also worth noting that churches always split up along family lines.)

Conclusions

I have tried to describe some of the features of the Malukan religious history after migration to the Netherlands in 1951. In accordance with the general history of Maluku in exile, I have argued that—due to the politico-historical background—sympathies with either the RMS, the Netherlands, or Indonesia each had its own difficulties and required choices. No wonder a whole spectrum of churches with different opinions on this matter came into existence. These churches can be distinguished according to their “internal markers of identity” (with respect to other Malukan churches) and “external markers of ethnoreligious identity” (with respect to Dutch society and its churches).

It may be concluded that the colonial Agama Ambon had very limited scope to transform itself and flourish anew. A pervasive emphasis on the RMS, the symbol par excellence of Malukan identity, invaded church ritual. Notwithstanding the commotion caused by the numerous schisms, the general conservative attitude of the churches enabled them to play a stabilizing role as well, both in Malukan society in general and within the lives of its individual members, in particular those of the first generation.

REFERENCES

- Bartels, D. 1989. *Moluccans in exile: A struggle for ethnic survival, socialization, identity formation, and emancipation among an East-Indonesian minority in the Netherlands*. Utrecht and Leiden: COMT/IWM.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1972. Culture contact and schismogenesis. In *Steps to an ecology of mind*, collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing.
- Wittermans, T. 1991. *Social organization among Ambonese refugees in Holland*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.